

KISSING BUGS

Hemiptera: Reduviidae

Triatoma spp.

Bug of the Month



Photo: Lisa Brown, CC BY-NC

“Kissing bugs” are the common name for several species of blood-feeding insects in the genus *Triatoma*. In Pennsylvania, the species *Triatoma sanguisuga* is most common. It is a large, dark brown insect with orange or red markings along the edges of its body. Although they are native to the United States, kissing bugs are uncommon in PA and are far less abundant than mosquitoes or ticks.

Kissing bugs are slow-developing insects that typically live outdoors in wooded areas, rock piles, or animal nests. They feed at night, using a long, needle-like mouthpart to take blood meals from mammals, birds, or reptiles. Occasionally, they wander indoors—often attracted to lights—or encounter people during warm months. Kissing bugs get their name from their tendency to bite

around the face, though they can feed anywhere on the body. Their bites are usually painless, but some people experience swelling or allergic reactions. While kissing bugs are famous for transmitting the parasite that causes Chagas disease in parts of Latin America, the public health risk in Pennsylvania is considered very low. Local transmission has not been documented in the state.

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